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SUBJECT: HAC: MORE DEVELOPMENT, LESS FOOD AID

REF: A: Khartoum 01469, B: 01472

¶1. (SBU) Summary: In a lengthy September 26 meeting with CDA Fernandez, deputy head of the Humanitarian Aid Commission (HAC) Hassabo Abdelrahman praised the U.S. role in humanitarian relief operations in Sudan, but maintained that the focus should shift to early recovery and development. There was too much food aid, he claimed, which was flooding the local economy. On the issue of WFP's shipment of U.S. donated corn-soya blend (CSB) currently blocked at Port Sudan, Hassabo said that it should be tested by an international survey team for GMO content. While the past six months since the expiration of the GMO waiver policy have been a period of uncertainty for US and other donors' shipments of humanitarian cereals and other commodities, Sudan is allowing the import of the majority of food aid donated by the international community, despite its stated economic concerns. CDA urged Hassabo to cooperate with the U.S. and the international community in a transparent manner on these and other issues, citing a lack of trust and dialogue at the heart of many of the bilateral concerns. End summary.

TOO MUCH FOOD...

¶2. (SBU) While recognizing U.S. humanitarian contributions to Sudan over the past twenty years, and noting that one quarter of all NGOs operating in Sudan were U.S.-based, Hassabo lamented that the huge quantities of grain and other food products being sent to Sudan - 750,000 metric tons in 2006 according to him - were driving down prices of locally produced food. (Note: WFP imported approximately 490,000 MT of humanitarian food aid in 2006 and 306,000 MT to date in 2007. This year alone, WFP has utilized cash resources from donors to purchase nearly 110,000 MT of food produced in Sudan in the past year. End note.) There was simply too much food aid, he said, and the vast majority was going to Darfur at the expense of other regions of the country. (Note: It is true that 70 percent of WFP's emergency operation is in Darfur; however, nearly half the total beneficiaries of emergency food assistance are in Darfur, with ration levels at 100 percent for those IDPs living in camps. In more stable regions of Sudan, food insecurity is less acute, therefore less need for food aid. End note.)

¶3. (SBU) The massive quantities of sorghum and wheat were negatively affecting the traditional farming sector, he said, in places like Sennar and Gezira. While there were many truly needy among the 2.7 million people in Darfur receiving humanitarian food assistance, the modalities of delivering food were flawed. More food should be bought in other parts of Sudan. Hassabo advocated programs such as food for work, or food for agriculture rather than "free" food. (Note: Nearly 2 million beneficiaries of food aid are living in large, crowded IDP camps and settlements, where these types of activities would be difficult, if not impossible, to implement. End note.) He also noted that Darfuris preferred millet and sesame oil to either sorghum or wheat (or lentils or vegetable oil), and that as a result large quantities of food aid were actually being sold in Kordofan (Note: WFP has routinely conducts market studies to look

into this issue; while food aid is definitely monetized to some extent, in the majority of cases it is not above 'normal' levels where people sell or trade some food aid to buy other household items and pay for milling of the cereals. End note.)

¶4. (SBU) Hassabo also blamed excessive food aid in the IDP camps for limiting the number of people returning to their homes in Darfur. He suggested large numbers were returning to their lands of origin, such as the Zaghawa in North Darfur. Tribal reconciliation efforts were working, he said. There were more than 200,000 voluntary returnees in Jebel Marra, he claimed, but no humanitarian agencies there to assist them (only the Sudanese government); there were no tangible returns for peace, he said. Returnees complained, he alleged, that only IDPs get international assistance. In a recent trip with the wali of North Darfur and several Arab ambassadors, he said, he himself had seen successful reconciliation efforts between Abala, Turjum, Berti and Zaghawa in villages near Kutum.

...AND NOT ENOUGH DEVELOPMENT

¶5. (SBU) What Sudan needed were real international development efforts, Hassabo argued. The Joint Assessment Mission (JAM) process in the south was not working well, and returnees were not seeing the results they'd expected to accompany the end of violence. Southerners were not moving back to stay when they saw the lack of basic services and resources. He also faulted the World Bank for being too slow on the ground; the Bank had said it would take 32 million USD and 18 months to demine the railway between Bab al Musa and Wau, so the Sudanese government took SAF and SPLA troops, mainly engineers, re-trained them and built more than 600 kilometers of track for less than 1 million USD. "We need quick impact projects," he said, or there would be no progress to show before next year's

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census and the 2009 elections. Hassabo also urged the resumption of the Darfur JAM. "Documentation doesn't equal implementation," he argued. The U.S. provided one billion USD in aid to Sudan yearly, he acknowledged, but "people still remember roads." He also requested technical support and training along the lines of DFID programs.

¶6. (SBU) CDA agreed that there was real need to move from humanitarian work to early recovery and development, and briefed Hassabo on recent DJAM discussions (Ref. A). He also reminded Hassabo that the U.S. would be funding twenty-six percent of the costs of the hybrid force. Peace in Darfur had three components, he said: the hybrid, the political process and development. This past year, however, the international community had expended incredible efforts in getting acceptance from the Sudanese for the first component, delaying the second two. "There is no real difference between the Sudanese and U.S. agendas in Darfur," CDA said, if the Sudanese Government really believes in its public statements.

BLOCKED SHIPMENT OF WFP FOOD AID

¶7. (SBU) CDA also urged greater dialogue between Sudan and the international community: "There is a political issue here, a lack of trust." Raising the issue of the 4,000 metric tons of WFP corn-soya blend (CSB) being blocked due to GMO concerns, CDA said he'd sent dip notes, letters, and demarched "everyone," including MFA Lam Akol (Ref. B). This could have a negative impact on the Sudanese, CDA warned, if the international community equated the blocking of life-saving nutritional supplements with a concerted effort on the part of the Sudanese government to deprive people in Darfur of food. This is even worse, if WFP has to cut rations in October, during Ramadan and before the peace talks.

¶8. (SBU) In his lengthy rejoinder, Hassabo indicated that if an international survey group would produce a certificate saying the CSB was safe for consumption, there would be no problem. "We've only stopped 4,000 metric tons of food, which had no labels, and released more than 700,000 metric tons," he said, which demonstrated the Sudanese government's good intentions. European markets would never

purchase Sudanese products if they contained GMO, Hassabo added. Hassabo also informed CDA that for any questions on humanitarian issues, including food aid, one should go directly to him for real answers not other government ministries. (Comment: USAID has been in direct dialogue with Hassabo on a multitude of food aid issues over the past several months, with few positive results thus far. End comment.)

USAID'S EFFORTS TO CONTINUE FLOW
OF HUMANITARIAN FOOD AID

¶9. USAID/Sudan has an extensive history of working with HAC, and Hassabo in particular, in an effort to address GNU reported concerns related to food aid impact on the market and concerns over commodities containing GMO. Since January of this year, when the government stopped issuing its standard GMO-waivers without notice, USAID has been working with HAC and WFP principally, as well as with the Sudanese Standards and Metrology (SSMO) to come to agreement on the protocols for import of humanitarian food assistance. With more than 70 percent of WFP food aid imports being distributed to nearly 3 million displaced and conflict-affected in Darfur, and as the largest donor to WFP (70 percent of food aid received by WFP in Sudan is provided by USAID), the USG clearly has demonstrated its commitment to ensuring this assistance continues to reach those in critical need. USAID has met with Hassabo on a number of occasions regarding these general food aid issues as well as specifically on GMO, and continues to strive toward a positive outcome. A detailed account on these issues and efforts to date will be provided via septel.

SMALL WINDOW FOR IMPROVEMENT

¶10. (SBU) Hassabo also drew a line between politically motivated activities and humanitarian ones. A "high-level" official from the Clinton years had told him that the U.S. had significant "interests" in Sudan - in its land, oil and status on the African continent. CDA agreed that humanitarian work was sensitive, but cautioned Hassabo that actions such as the expulsion of the CARE director carried a heavy political price. (Note: Hassabo also accused OTI contractor DAI of trying to "influence" the upcoming Sudanese elections. End note.)

¶11. (SBU) The next six months provide an opportunity to improve U.S.-Sudan relations, CDA said, but the status quo would have to change. He pointed out a recent attempt by USAID to travel to Kassala, which had been denied. Hassabo explained that this was an

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example of poor coordination between various Sudanese agencies, resulting in misunderstandings. Let's solve these things, CDA said, and better to do it through dialogue than in the media.

¶12. (SBU) Comment: Hassabo is obviously a very well-informed government official on a wide range of issues -more so than many other interlocutors (this is perhaps not surprising given his prior work as an intelligence officer in Darfur). Hassabo mentioned several times his desire to have a better relationship with USAID, which would be welcome. He also noted that DFID had provided training and technical support for the HAC, hinting that greater U.S. engagement with them would lead to greater cooperation. While his claims of hundreds of thousands of voluntary returnees in Darfur is the usual government rhetoric, it is important to continue the dialogue with him on these critical issues while realizing that the Sudanese regime loves to wage low-level, grinding bureaucratic battles of this sort.

¶13. (SBU) Comment continued: CDA and USAID Director Fleuret will pursue this in an upcoming meeting with Hassabo. We are also sending a reclama in Arabic to him on the points he raised and S/E Natsios will raise the issue with senior Sudanese officials. End comment.